

**321.89 Abandoned vehicles.**

1. *Definitions.* As used in [this section](#) and [sections 321.90](#) and [321.91](#) unless the context otherwise requires:

a. “*Abandoned vehicle*” means any of the following:

(1) A vehicle that has been left unattended on public property for more than twenty-four hours and lacks current registration plates or two or more wheels or other parts which renders the vehicle totally inoperable.

(2) A vehicle that has remained illegally on public property for more than twenty-four hours.

(3) A vehicle that has been unlawfully parked on private property or has been placed on private property without the consent of the owner or person in control of the property for more than twenty-four hours.

(4) A vehicle that has been legally impounded by order of a police authority and has not been reclaimed for a period of ten days. However, a police authority may declare the vehicle abandoned within the ten-day period by commencing the notification process in [subsection 3](#).

(5) Any vehicle parked on the highway determined by a police authority to create a hazard to other vehicle traffic.

(6) A vehicle that has been impounded pursuant to [section 321J.4B](#) by order of the court and whose owner has not paid the impoundment fees after notification by the person or agency responsible for carrying out the impoundment order.

b. “*Demolisher*” means a person licensed under [chapter 321H](#) whose business it is to convert a vehicle to junk, processed scrap, or scrap metal, or otherwise to wreck or dismantle vehicles.

c. “*Police authority*” means the state patrol, any law enforcement agency of a county or city, or any special security officer employed by the state board of regents under [section 262.13](#).

2. *Authority to take possession of abandoned vehicles.* A police authority, upon the authority’s own initiative or upon the request of any other authority having the duties of control of highways or traffic, shall take into custody an abandoned vehicle on public property and may take into custody an abandoned vehicle on private property. The police authority may employ its own personnel, equipment, and facilities or hire a private entity, equipment, and facilities for the purpose of removing, preserving, storing, or disposing of abandoned vehicles. A property owner or other person in control of private property may employ a private entity who is a garagekeeper, as defined in [section 321.90](#), to dispose of an abandoned vehicle, and the private entity may take into custody the abandoned vehicle without a police authority’s initiative. If a police authority employs a private entity to dispose of abandoned vehicles, the police authority shall provide the private entity with the names and addresses of the registered owners, all lienholders of record, and any other known claimant to the vehicle or the personal property found in the vehicle. The owners, lienholders, or other claimants of the abandoned vehicle shall not have a cause of action against a private entity for action taken under [this section](#) if the private entity provides notice as required by [subsection 3](#), paragraph “a”.

3. *Notification of owner, lienholders, and other claimants.*

a. A police authority or private entity that takes into custody an abandoned vehicle shall send notice by certified mail that the vehicle has been taken into custody no more than twenty days after taking custody of the vehicle. Notice shall be sent to the last known address of record of the last known registered owner of the vehicle, all lienholders of record, and any other known claimant to the vehicle.

b. Notice shall be deemed given when mailed. The notice shall include all of the following:

(1) A description of the year, make, model, and vehicle identification number of the vehicle.

(2) The location of the facility where the vehicle is being held.

(3) Information for the persons receiving the notice of their right to reclaim the vehicle and personal property contained therein within ten days after the effective date of the

notice. Persons may reclaim the vehicle or personal property upon payment of all towing, preservation, and storage charges resulting from placing the vehicle in custody and upon payment of the costs of notice required pursuant to [this subsection](#).

(4) A statement that failure of the owner, lienholders, or claimants to exercise their right to reclaim the vehicle or personal property within the time provided shall be deemed a waiver by the owner, lienholders, and claimants of all right, title, claim, and interest in the vehicle or personal property.

(5) A statement that failure to reclaim the vehicle or personal property is deemed consent for the police authority or private entity to sell the vehicle at a public auction or dispose of the vehicle to a demolisher and to dispose of the personal property by sale or destruction.

c. If the abandoned vehicle was taken into custody by a private entity without a police authority's initiative, the notice shall state that the private entity may claim a garagekeeper's lien as described in [section 321.90, subsection 1](#), and may proceed to sell or dispose of the vehicle.

d. If the abandoned vehicle was taken into custody by a police authority or by a private entity hired by a police authority, the notice shall state that any person claiming rightful possession of the vehicle or personal property who disputes the planned disposition of the vehicle or personal property by the police authority or private entity or of the assessment of fees and charges provided by [this section](#) may ask for an evidentiary hearing before the police authority to contest those matters.

e. If the persons receiving notice do not ask for a hearing or exercise their right to reclaim the vehicle or personal property within the ten-day reclaiming period, the owner, lienholders, or claimants shall no longer have any right, title, claim, or interest in or to the vehicle or the personal property.

f. A court in any case in law or equity shall not recognize any right, title, claim, or interest of the owner, lienholders, or claimants after the expiration of the ten-day reclaiming period.

g. If it is impossible to determine with reasonable certainty the identities and addresses of the last registered owner and all lienholders, notice by one publication in one newspaper of general circulation in the area where the vehicle was abandoned shall be sufficient to meet all requirements of notice under [this section](#). The published notice may contain multiple listings of abandoned vehicles but shall be published within the same time requirements and contain the same information as prescribed for mailed notice in [this subsection](#).

4. *Reclamation of abandoned vehicles.* Prior to driving an abandoned vehicle away from the premises, a person who received or who is reclaiming the vehicle on behalf of a person who received notice under [subsection 3](#) shall present to the police authority or private entity, as applicable, the person's valid driver's license and proof of financial liability coverage as provided in [section 321.20B](#).

5. *Auction of abandoned vehicles.*

a. If an abandoned vehicle has not been reclaimed as provided for in [subsection 3](#), the police authority or private entity shall make a determination as to whether or not the vehicle shall be sold for use upon the highways. If the vehicle is not sold for use upon the highways, it shall be sold for junk, or demolished and sold as scrap. The police authority or private entity shall sell the vehicle at public auction. Notwithstanding any other provision of [this section](#), a police authority or private entity may dispose of the vehicle to a demolisher for junk without public auction after complying with the notification procedures in [subsection 3](#). The purchaser of the vehicle takes title free and clear of all liens and claims of ownership, shall receive a sales receipt from the police authority or private entity, and is entitled to register the vehicle and receive a certificate of title if sold for use upon the highways. If the vehicle is sold or disposed of to a demolisher for junk, the demolisher shall make application for a junking certificate to the county treasurer within thirty days of purchase and shall surrender the sales receipt in lieu of the certificate of title.

b. From the proceeds of the sale of an abandoned vehicle the police authority, if the police authority did not hire a private entity, shall reimburse itself for the expenses of the auction, the costs of towing, preserving, and storing which resulted from placing the abandoned vehicle in custody, all notice and publication costs incurred pursuant to [subsection 3](#), the cost of inspection, and any other costs incurred except costs of bookkeeping and other

administrative costs. Any remainder from the proceeds of a sale shall be held for the owner of the vehicle or entitled lienholder for ninety days, and shall then be deposited in the road use tax fund. The costs to police authorities of auction, towing, preserving, storage, and all notice and publication costs, and all other costs which result from placing abandoned vehicles in custody, whenever the proceeds from a sale of the abandoned vehicles are insufficient to meet these expenses and costs, shall be paid from the road use tax fund and are the obligation of the last owner or owners, jointly and severally.

c. The director of transportation shall establish by rule a claims procedure to be followed by police authorities in obtaining expenses and costs from the fund and procedures for reimbursement of expenses and costs to a private entity hired by a police authority to take custody of an abandoned vehicle. If a private entity has been hired by a police authority, the police authority shall file a claim with the department for reimbursement of towing fees which shall be paid from the road use tax fund.

[C73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §321.89]

84 Acts, ch 1305, §59; 85 Acts, ch 64, §2; 87 Acts, ch 123, §1; 88 Acts, ch 1158, §66; 92 Acts, ch 1238, §31; 95 Acts, ch 48, §3; 95 Acts, ch 118, §13; 96 Acts, ch 1126, §4; 98 Acts, ch 1074, §22; 2000 Acts, ch 1016, §11; 2005 Acts, ch 35, §31; 2005 Acts, ch 64, §1; 2009 Acts, ch 130, §23, 24; 2021 Acts, ch 22, §1, 2; 2021 Acts, ch 174, §15

Referred to in §8A.323, 80.39, 321.20B, 321.88, 321.90, 321.91, 321J.4B, 555B.1

Subsection 3 amended

NEW subsection 4 and former subsection 4 renumbered as 5